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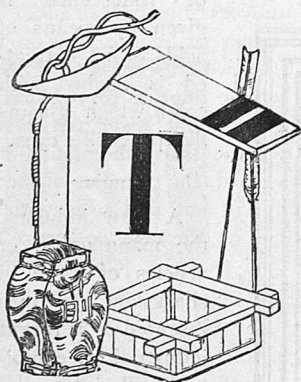
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ART NEEDLEWORK

ORIENTAL EMBROIDERY.



HE most celebrated embroiderers of antiquity were the Phrygians, who, Pliny says, invented embroidery. Of their superior skill we are assured, inasmuch as an embroiderer was called "phrygio," and embroidery in gold "aurophrygium," from which comes the old English word "orprey." They were

generally employed by other nations in their finer work. Plutarch speaks of the wrought veil of the temple as having been done by them. But the art spread rapidly throughout the Eastern nations, and in the Christian world attained as high a popularity as among the ancients. Pope Paschal was a distinguished connoisseur in embroidery. Particular mention of two pieces in his collection has come down to us. One represented the story of the virgins; the other was simply decorative, representing peafowls with all the brilliancy of their plumage on an amber ground. A piece of embroidery for a portière, evidently suggested by this "chef d'œuvre" of Pope Paschal, now hangs in the rooms of the New York Decorative Art Society. The robes of the Christian bishops of the Roman and Greek churches were then, as now, covered with embroidery. This was the work of high-born and devoted dames, as we learn from old romances. Ultimately some knowledge of the art became almost universal. There is a story of an English school-committeeman who examined a child and found she could neither read nor write. "But, sir," she exclaimed, "I can crochet Moses." There are very few of our grandmothers who have not either crocheted Moses or perpetrated Aaron or some of the patriarchs in Berlin wools.

The embroidery of the East adhered to the purest canons of decorative art, or rather these have been formulated out of Oriental embroidery, which is wrought almost with the accuracy of instinct. Among the different nations it partook of their individual characteristics, and developed much in the same manner as did afterward architecture and the kindred arts. Owen Jones says the spandril of a Moorish arch and an Indian shawl are constructed much on the same principle.

Egyptian embroidery is distinguished by the same symbolism which is at the foot of all Egyptian mural decoration. The lotus and the papyrus, signifying food for the body and the mind, and the feather, the emblem of sovereignty, are the prevailing natural forms. These run through an infinite number of changes, yet retain with great ingenuity the original curves and shapes. Combined with these in myriad designs is the straight line, denoting the Nile at rest, forming the Egyptian zigzag, and the curved line, signifying the waves of the great river. The colors of Egyptian embroidery are chiefly the three primitives—red, yellow, and blue—combining with white.

Arabian embroidery, although based on that of Turkey and Persia, has distinctly a style of its own. From Persia Arabia received its elegance and the beautiful undulating forms known as arabsques, which were transmitted to the Moors, and which have made the Alham-

bra so glorious and so fruitful to the student of art. From Turkey Arabia received the acanthus, derived from the Romans, but represents it with one leaf growing out of another, thus breaking the continuity of the Roman scroll. Arabian embroidery is distinguished by its simplicity and what may be called its spirituality.

It is claimed that Turkish embroidery was beautiful until it became degraded by contact with Western nations. That it imitated Western patterns is certain. There is a piece of Turkish embroidery in New York dating from the seventeenth century, in which the fleur de lis has a prominent place, presumably copied from French brocades, which had found their way eastward. The crudity of modern Turkish tambour work is obvious. The conventional foliage of Turkish ornamentation is taken from Persia, but it is far less imaginative and less graceful, and its undue proportion of green and black by no means takes the place of the thousand intermingling Persian dyes. Turkey also took the acanthus leaf, but used it grossly and with exaggeration. As in the Alhambra sentences from the Koran are used with effect, so in Turkish embroidery the signature of Mohammed II. is introduced. Of this there are two legends. One relates that Mohammed II., who was more warrior than scribe, being required to give his signature, dipped three fingers in the ink and made the famous monogram. The other is that after the capture of Constantinople he

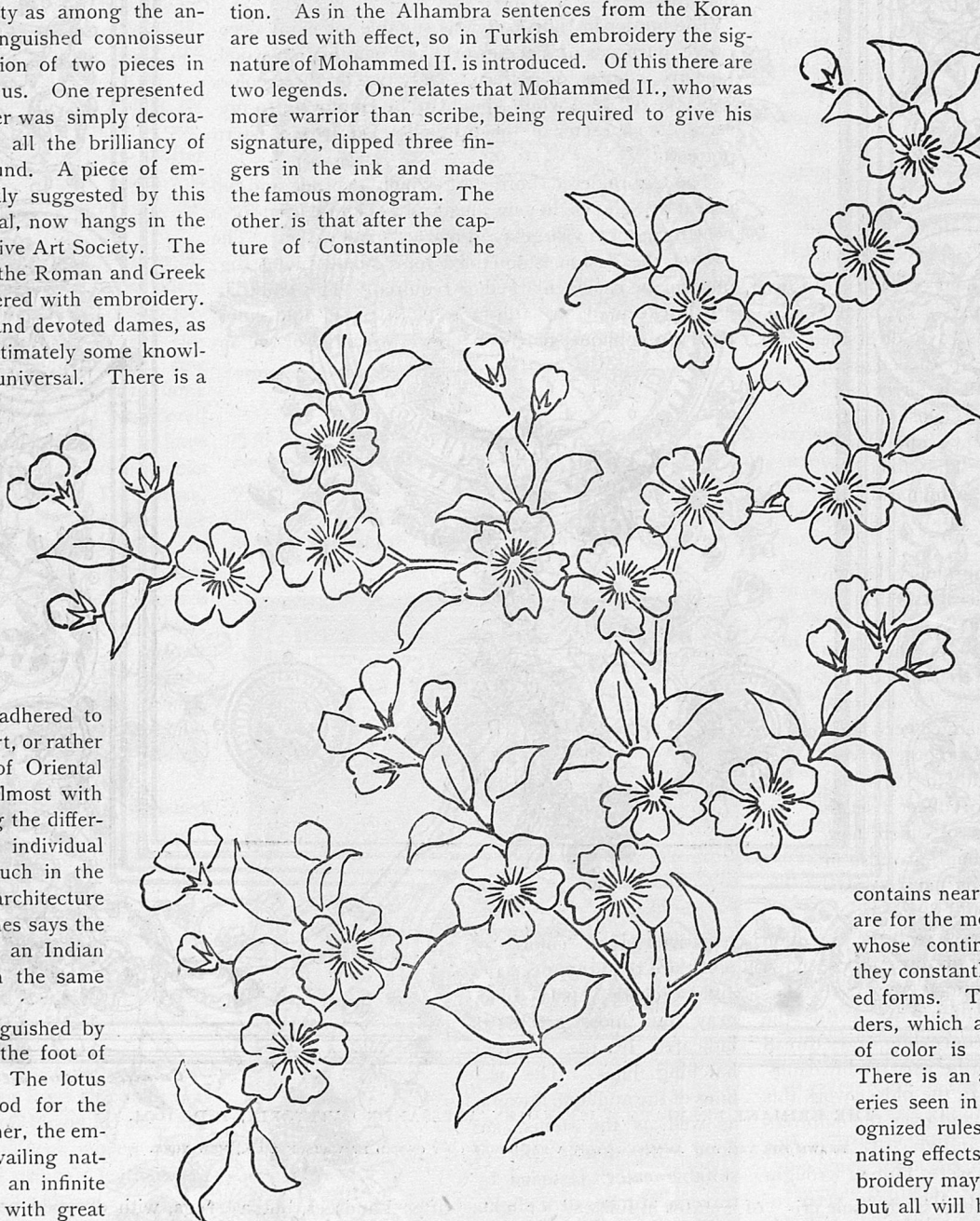
pletely carried out that in any good specimen of Indian decoration no detail can be taken away or added without injuring the general effect. The treatment of natural flowers is similar to that of the Persian, though not so varied. The lotus, the pomegranate, the pineapple, and the palm, with the twisted cord from the stem, are the basis of most Indian designs. The use of color is similar to that in Moorish decoration. It is in three planes. Red, for example, is the groundwork, giving the depth, and receiving the slender, scroll-like tracery which breaks up the surface. The blues and greens are on the second plane, and gold and yellow, catching the highest lights, are on the third. It has been said that Indian workmen use degraded colors, making use of magenta and other aniline tints. But it should be remembered that instead of working for pure color, as do the Chinese and Japanese, they strive for tone, which is the great charm of Indian decoration.

While the Indian embroideries are so beautiful in proportion and so pleasing in tone, the Persian are more fanciful, daring, and varied. To the Persian the representation of all things was permitted. It must be remembered that

Persia was the most artistic nation of the East before the introduction of the Mohammedan religion, and with the exception of Cashmere shawls and Chinese porcelain excelled in every branch of art, and transmitted its influence to the surrounding nations. As we have seen, the decoration of the Alhambra is at the root Persian. This superiority Persia has retained, and to-day those districts most remote from European influence preserve the same high character in their productions. No other nation acquired such skill in conventionalizing flowers. In Persian embroideries we have not only the pomegranate, the lotus, the pineapple, and the palm, but all the flowers of the field and the garden. There is a piece of Persian embroidery in the Metropolitan Museum which

contains nearly an entire flora. The patterns are for the most part in light interlaced designs whose continuity is scarcely broken, though they constantly change into new and unsuspected forms. The exception is in the case of borders, which are executed in masses. The use of color is of the most daring description. There is an audacity in many of the embroideries seen in this country which defies all recognized rules, but which produces most fascinating effects. A square inch of Persian embroidery may contain the tints of the rainbow, but all will be found to enhance the value of some one color.

Certain uses of the materials belong to all the best specimens of Oriental embroideries, and may be accepted as axioms in decorative art. When gold alone is used, if in heavy masses it is wrought into a dark ground. If the design is in slender lines a lighter ground is used. In either case the ground is hatched in. When an ornament of one color is wrought into a ground of contrasting color it is edged in with lighter shades. Gold ornaments, on the contrary, are edged in with a darker color. Where a number of colors are used, a gold or silver line leads them down to the back-



JAPANESE EMBROIDERY DESIGN. "CHERRY BLOSSOMS."

entered the church of St. Sophia, and with three fingers dipped in Christian blood inscribed it on the wall, where the stain remains to this day.

The most beautiful of the Oriental embroideries are the Indian and Persian. The Indian is considered perfect in all that is purely decorative in color and form. But in this statement color must be understood as signifying tone, and form as the equal distribution or proportion of the ornament over the surface. This is so com-

ground. As in the Moorish decoration of the Alhambra, the ornament is never sharply defined; on the contrary, by the use of lighter shades it appears almost in

as heirlooms is due the perfection in which we get them after the lapse of so many years. Of their age they show plenty of proofs. Many have been carefully overwrought, lined where the fabric has given away, and cared for as tenderly as a Western dowager cares for her old lace.

MARY GAY HUMPHREYS.

SUPPLEMENT DESIGNS FOR NEEDLEWORK.

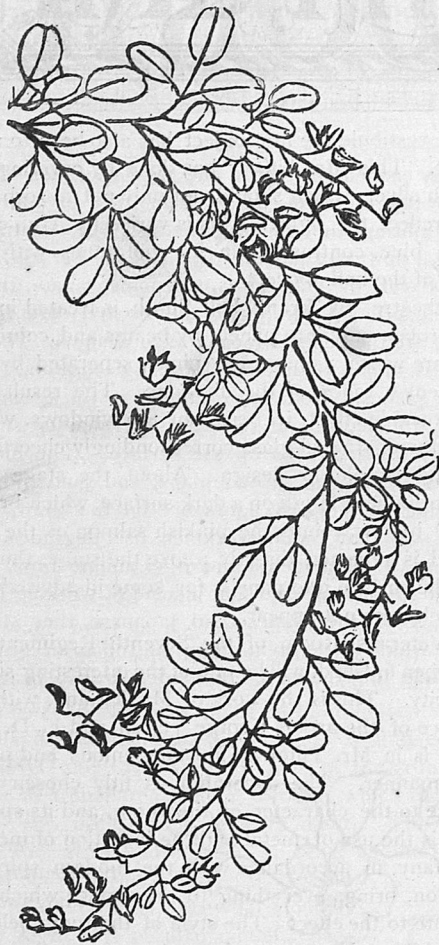
AMONG the designs given in the supplement this month, those for crewel-work are especially striking. The blackberry border will be found suitable for a medium-sized rug, to be placed before an easy-chair or under a writing-table or piano. It is executed with thick crewels on a rough light brown oatmeal crash, leaves, flowers, and fruits of the blackberry shrub being embroidered in the proper colors. The petal centres and berries might be formed of French knots, but a far more expeditious and effective way is to make chains of crewel wool with the crochet hook, and sew them on in such a manner as to imitate the peculiar surface of the blackberry.

The design for a curtain border represents a conventional arrangement of the water-lily in a particularly bold style, and can be executed in satin appliqué, embroidered with arrasene or crewels on Roman satin sheeting in colors to match the curtain for which the border is intended. The various stitches employed are so clearly visible in the engraving that they need no further explanation.

The border in Indian style is suitable for many decorative purposes of needlework, and painting on wood, tapestry, canvas, or pottery. Only two or three colors—black, red, and white—ought to be employed, to preserve the character of the original taken from Eastern pottery.

The embroidered border, of which a corner and full repeat are shown in our illustration, can be used for a hearth-rug or any large-sized mat or small carpet. The size of the design is intended for a small oblong rug, but can be easily enlarged if required. The embroidery is executed on satin-faced cloth of old-gold color, partly in appliqué, partly in crewel work. For the ap-

section in detail are given in opposite corners, is done in appliqué embroidery. The dark ground of this most effective design consists of red silk plush, the three rhomboid-shaped devices of toile Colbert. To work the design a piece of toile Colbert of the required size is securely tacked to a piece of stout paper or cloth. All the outlines of the leaves and of the lower half of the fruit are executed with bronze-colored split silk. The scales on the pointed top of the pines are outlined in dull rose color. Rose-colored split silk in two shades judiciously distributed is also used for nearly all the herring-bone stitches, except those which fill the lower scales of the fruit and are worked in bronze silk. The feather stitches in the upper scales are done in rose color, and the fillings of the two crescents and the stem in a dull blue. Thus the pine appears rose-colored on the top, and of a brown tint in the lower part, resting on a bluish stem. After the three rhomboids have been embroidered as described, the triangles of the red plush frame are carefully cut out, and fixed with silk in their respective positions on the toile Colbert. The lines where rhomboids and triangles join are covered with a cord, made of twisted blue silk fixed with traverse stitches. The embroidery of the plush is very simple; the straight lines are done in rose-colored silk, with feather-stitch stars in bronze. Of the three arrow-shaped devices between the rhomboids, that in the centre is blue, the two others yellowish green. The diamond-shaped devices in the triangle are outlined in bronze color, and filled in with stitches in two shades of rose and two shades of blue. The outer rim of the cushion is made of moss-green plush, embroidered with cherry-colored and blue arrow stitches. The combed-out tassels ought to be composed of the two principal colors used in the embroidery.



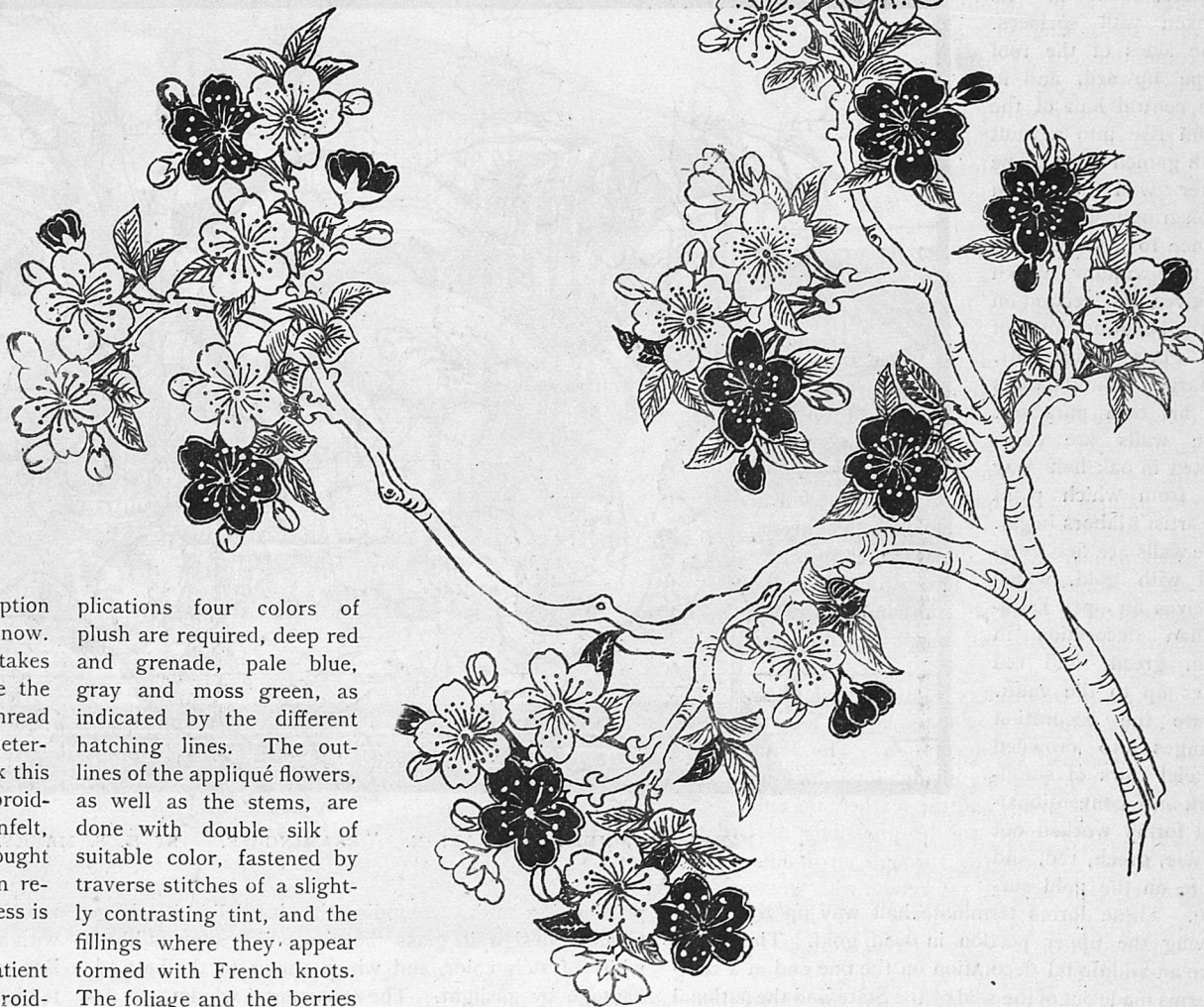
EMBROIDERY DESIGN.

relief. There are several prominent examples of such effects owned in New York. One is a large table-cover remarkably well preserved. It is gayly diversified with flowers, which are wrought out to the edges in delicate gradations, ending with a silver line. Another is a curtain for a treasure-closet in appliqué, in which the ornaments seem almost carved. The object is evident. The effect is at once perceived, and each closer examination reveals fresh beauties, so that the study is always bewildering and new.

There is another kind of embroidery known as Rhodian bands, which produces its effect in monotonous and negatively. That is to say, the embroidery works out the design on the white ground, the color being the relief; and the stitches, which are turned now this way and now that, throw off the light in a manner very ingenious. These bands are in great repute for æsthetic furniture. It is said a lady in Paris has been twelve years endeavoring to collect a set to furnish a room. Bosnian borders, of which there is a set in the Metropolitan Museum, are also in monotonous, but the embroidery as usual constitutes the design.

The stitches of these embroideries, with the exception of the stem-stitch, are unlike any of those in use now. The stem-stitch, however, in almost every case takes up but a single thread of the fabric. As a rule the stitches are absolutely compact, concealing every thread of the ground. The antiques can be very readily determined by the state of the gold. In the oldest work this is so pliable that in passing the hand over the embroidery the difference between this and the silk is unfelt, and the ceremonial bath-towels were largely wrought with it. When this has been worn they have been re-touched with wider, coarser metal, and the roughness is immediately apparent.

Modern embroidery is all surface work. The patient and exact toil which produces these Oriental embroideries, whose workmanship is without flaw, can only be found in those countries of the sun where the days are longer than ours. Such embroideries are the labor of years. When a child is born a piece of embroidery is begun as its wedding-gift, and the work goes on until the day arrives. Such are the greater number of the large pieces we find covered with rich embroidery. And to the fact that they have been afterward treasured

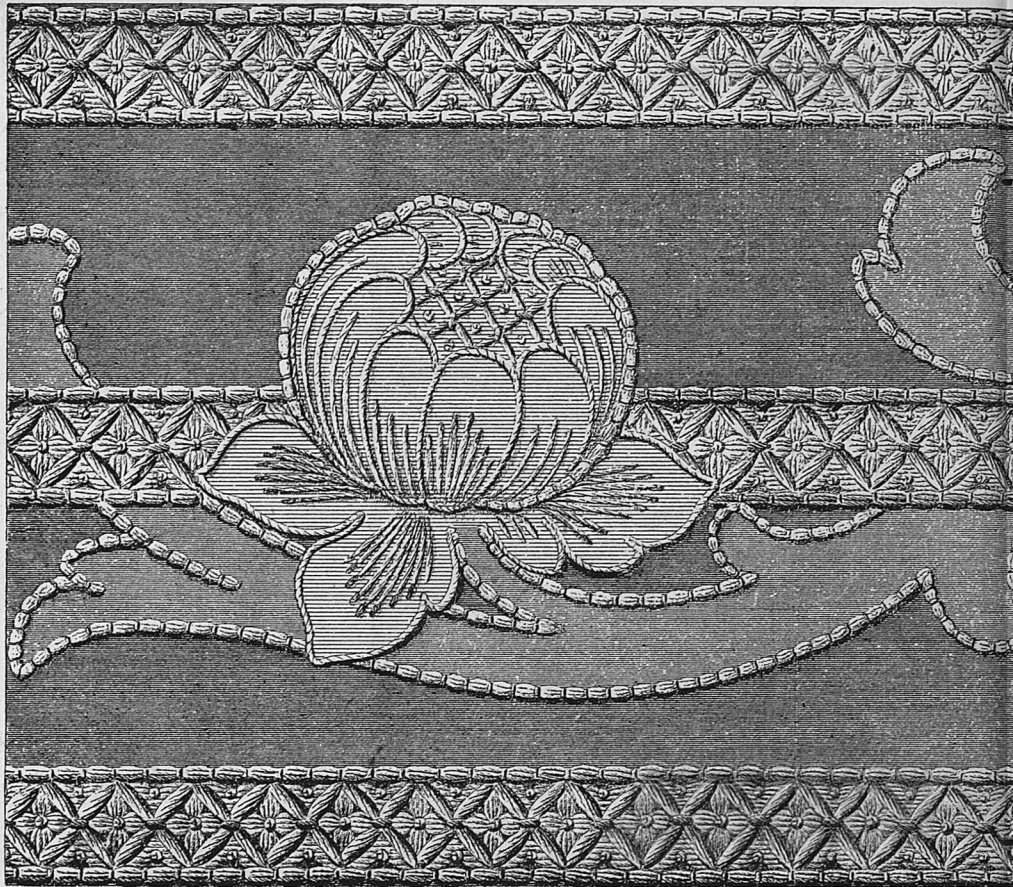
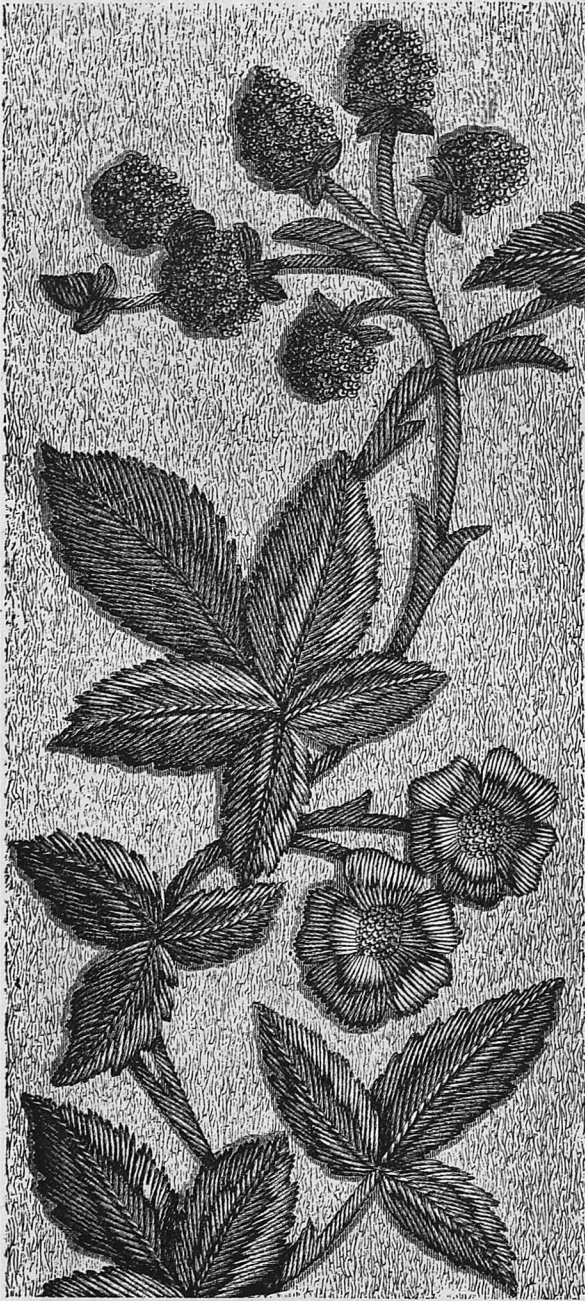


JAPANESE EMBROIDERY DESIGN. "CHERRY BLOSSOMS."

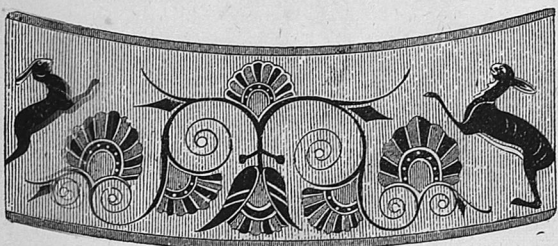
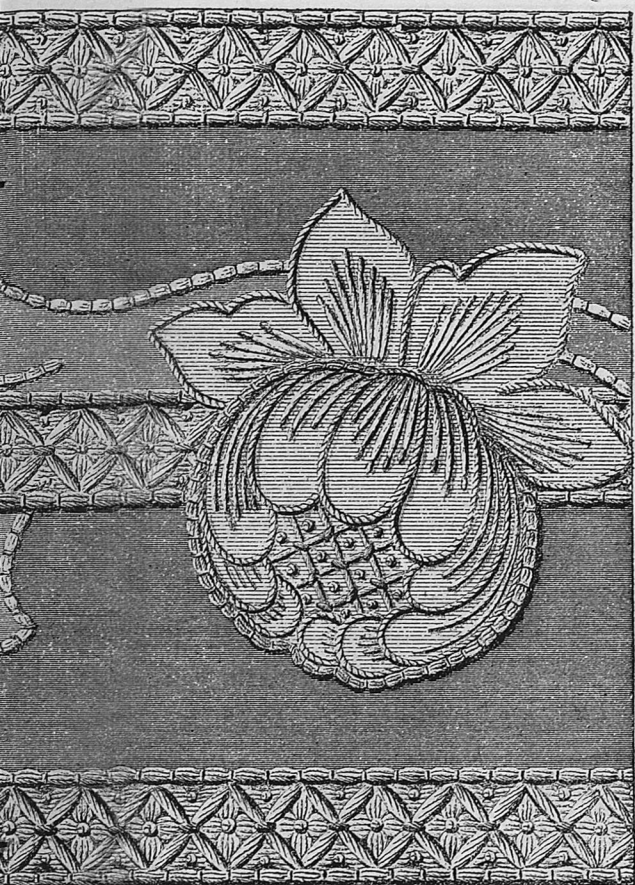
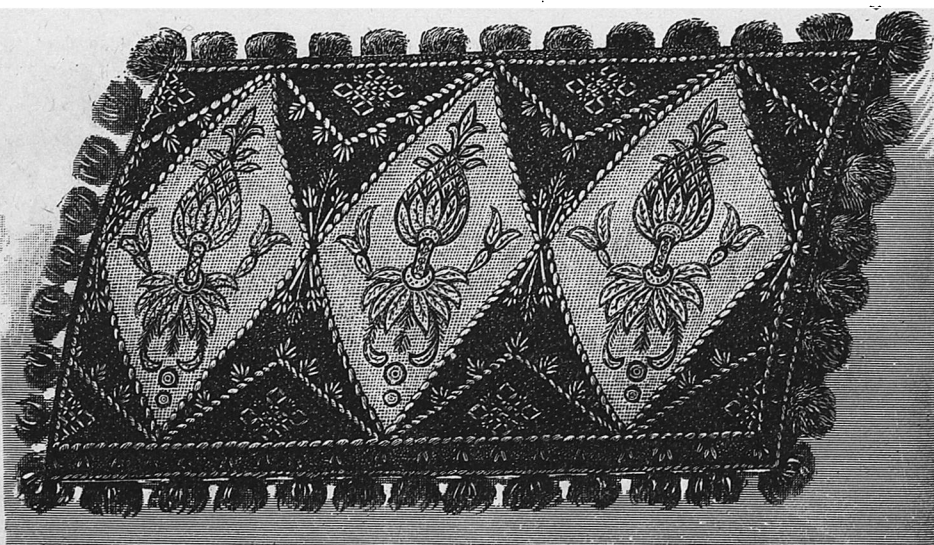
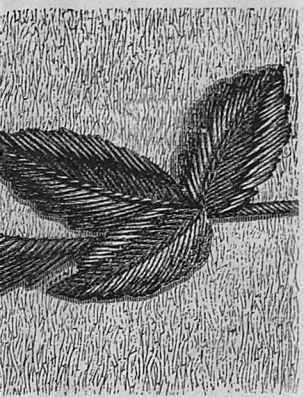
plications four colors of plush are required, deep red and grenade, pale blue, gray and moss green, as indicated by the different hatching lines. The outlines of the appliqué flowers, as well as the stems, are done with double silk of suitable color, fastened by traverse stitches of a slightly contrasting tint, and the fillings where they appear formed with French knots. The foliage and the berries are worked in crewel-stitch, with embroidery, silk, or fine crewels of a dead green color, properly shaded and outlined with a cord or stem stitch. The frame border consists of two lines of red filloselle transversely fastened with brown silk, with a row of pale blue French knots between.

The oblong cushion, of which a complete view and a

In choosing your wools for crewel work beware of bright and vivid hues, especially of greens; sober tints of olive, sage, and dead leaf color blend best together. In fact, all the old-fashioned shades will be found suitable.



April, 1881.



ROIDERY DESIGNS.

101.)